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ABSTRACT

This guide to the basic literature on self sufficient living presents current selection tools for use by public librarians. Sections are narrative and describe a newspaper, a magazine, a specialized publishing company, out-of-print sources, government publications, a specialized lending library, and miscellaneous publications. (KP)

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BACK-TO-THE-LAND:

Self-Help for Librarians

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BACK-TO-THE-LAND:
Self-Help for Librarians

Don Wismer

One of the most vivid phenomena of the past decade has been a widespread turning away from what is perceived as a mechanized and increasingly depersonal society. This drive toward "self-sufficiency" might be described as an attempt toward increased control over one's way of life through decreased reliance on industrial technology. Its signs are all over -- homesteading, gardening, alternate energy sources, canning, crafts, home construction. Its advocates posit that self-sufficiency can be achieved with no decrease in the "quality" of life; rather, it perforce signals an increase in that quality.

Because of the nature of industrial society, those interested in self-sufficient living almost always turn to the land for resources and flexibility. Thus most of the following selection tools are rural-oriented -- not all, since there is some interest in inner city neighborhood organizing.

For public libraries, the demand is large and growing. One guess is that demand for self-help resources is the third largest category which the public library faces, behind only biography/autobiography and social problems.

In the following, the reader will become acquainted with the basic literature of self-sufficiency, in such a way that it will become easy to select the best of the current tools for interested patrons. Not everything has been noted, of course,

but the major sources are there.

The Mother Earth News

The best single source for the literature of self-sufficiency is undoubtedly *The Mother Earth News* (P.O. Box 70, Hendersonville, NC 28739). Now in its eighth year of publication, *Mother* began as an 8½ x 11 newsprint bimonthly. Its second issue added a slick cover, and it has, with minor modifications, retained this format ever since. Each issue now boasts a fat 180 pages, with a pull-out poster of high quality. *Mother* was an idea whose time had come.

Unlike *Organic Gardening and Farming*, *Mother*'s orientation has always been somewhat more counter-culturally oriented -- 'political', if you will. It has gone beyond articles on how to grow this or that, probing deeply into alternative energy, with much on environmental and auxiliary social issues. But its basic orientation remains back-to-the-land. At one point, a schizophrenic tendency in the magazine, the result of a conflict between the desire to present purely rural-oriented material with the desire to highlight alternative, energy-intensive urban living, resulted in the sister magazine *Lifestyle!*. The latter was to stress alternative life-styles of any sort, while *Mother* would stick to rural living. *Lifestyle!* died after eight bi-monthly issues, the victim of poor circulation and staff exhaustion. *Mother* now offers occasional looks at urban living, mostly in its "Plowboy" interviews. Articles and features are mainly restricted to rural or semi-rural living.

Mother is a potent selection tool. Among the features with

bibliographic significance are: "Dear Mother" (letters to the editor, often dealing with books or pamphlets), the Plowboy interview, "Bits and Pieces" (miscellaneous notices), "Energy Flashes", feedback on preceding issues, a column of quotations from old-time farm magazines, "Access" (reports on useful products and publications), classified and display advertising, and the articles themselves.

But, while bibliographic indications are scattered throughout the magazine, eventually all items of *significant value* will appear on "Mother's Bookshelf". "Of significant value" is stressed, because *Mother* does not sell what she considers valueless -- and many of the opportunistic publications coming out on the wave of interest in self-sufficiency are of that category. Thus the librarian, if he or she trusts *Mother*'s judgement (as I do), has a partial reviewing tool built into the magazine. A recent flyer specifies:

> All titles stocked have been selected by the editors of THE MOTHER EARTH NEWS as the very best in their fields. MOTHER'S BOOKSHELF shies away from books which lack content or usefulness, or which merely jump on the bandwagon of 'alternative lifestyle' publishing. Thus -- and not surprisingly -- you'll find that most of the titles MOTHER stocks have been in print for many years. And should be for many more!

Each subscriber receives a yearly (more or less) catalog from Mother's Bookshelf, although a substantial number of holdings are listed in each issue of the magazine. In reply to a query regarding *Mother*'s policy towards libraries, the magazine notes that while no acquisition subscription service is offered, there is a definite effort to cater to libraries, with a 20% discount for orders totalling more than $50. One notices that a jobber

would offer a more substantial discount; *Mother* is in fact a retail outlet. However, it is a concentrated source of self-sufficiency publications, and many of its listings, being from obscure and private sources, are not found in the common librarians' bibliographic tools.

Organic Gardening and Farming

For perhaps 23 years, this publication has been the mainstay of a basic self-sufficiency movement whose orientations is almost exclusively ecological gardening and nutrition (as opposed to more radical alternative life-style and energy self-sufficiency, though OGAF is showing some signs of interest in especially the latter). The monthly magazine itself (Organic Park, Emmaus, PA 18049) does not carry many book reviews, although its classified and display ads do highlight a number of publications. But Rodale Press, its parent institution (same address), publishes some of the best garden encyclopedias in the world, as well as other books about organic gardening, food preservation, and so on. The Press also has a film division which is indexed in the standard sources.

Garden Way Publishing

Garden Way is a small publisher in Charlotte, Vermont 05445. It is extraordinarily in tune with the back-to-the-land market. Besides its own publications, it carries certain small press and private publications which have proven popular, as well as more common items such as *The Foxfire Book*. Unlike *Mother*, Garden Way does not seem to carry much on alternative energy (one book

listed), nor on pollution and related social issues. It avoids controversy on life-styles; but again, Garden Way is not an adjunct to a magazine, as is Mother's Bookshelf.

A recent catalog is divided into a number of sections revealing Garden Way's orientation. First are listed the company's own books, on all self-sufficiency topics: alternate energy (the one book), pole building, compost, sprouting, vegetable gardening, drying foods, poultry, trees, etc. A reprint series of classic homesteading items is presented. Then there are sections on: plain living, homesteading, retirement, country living, Foxfire, etc.; home building and repair; animal husbandry; gardening books, including vegetable growing, fruits, nuts, herbs, safe pest control, soil, reference books and a garden encyclopedia, greenhouses, etc.; cooking, preserving, pickling, canning, etc; and finally, country crafts, such as quilting, needlework, spinning, furniture, soaps, potting, toys, flower art, mushroom hunting and wild foods, camping, backpacking, and canoeing.

A query elicited the information that Garden Way does offer certain concessions to libraries: "Our policy is to give a discount of 20% to libraries on orders of from one to four books, with the discounts on the catalog given for larger orders". The catalog also lists Barden Way's book trade representatives and their addresses.

Garden Way offers a better discount schedule than *Mother*, but with a smaller stock of titles to choose from.

Out of print items

There may be some demand for out of print items which have not been reprinted by Garden Way or another publisher (many -- perhaps most -- of the valuable classics have in fact been reprinted). The antiquarian book trade remains the chief source of such items; but there are a number of smaller, often one-person, operations which specialize in gardening and homesteading. Their addresses are available from their classified ads in *Mother* and *Organic Gardening*. One such firm is Second Life Books, Upper East Hoosac St., Adams, MA 01220. It produces an occasional catalog of in-stock items. No discounts for libraries, but reliable, fast service.

Government publications

The United States government puts out a great deal of information of interest to homesteaders, home builders, etc. The librarian is free to consult the *Monthly Catalog* for selection purposes. However, since the use of this tool is tedious and the yield low, it is advisable to employ the more specific United States Department of Agriculture List No. 11, *List of available publications of the United States Department of Agriculture*, which is updated periodically. It is available from the U.S.D.A., Office of Communication, Washington, DC 20250.

List No. 11 is nearly 200 pages long, which gives one an idea of its wide-ranging scope. There is a subject index, a title index, a list of U.S.D.A. periodicals which might be of interest, and a list of "visual aids" available, mainly maps, charts, and posters. (Note item no. +M 1107, "Color filmstrips and slide

sets of the United States Department of Agriculture", a potential audiovisual source.) The main text of List No. 11 is arranged by subject. Since these publications are mainly pamphlets and official publications of the U.S.D.A., there is no author indication.

Among the topics: agricultural economics (farm finance, farm management,etc.), agricultural engineering (buildings, electricity and heating, machinery, water supply), animal science, civil defense, conservation, farmer cooperatives, U.S.D.A. administration (including its excellent series of yearbooks), entomology, extension work, foreign agriculture, forestry, home economics, marketing, plant science (by crop), rural development (including recreation), safety and fire prevention, soil science, statistics, and teaching aids.

U.S.D.A. offers various ordering arrangements, depending on whether the purchaser is an individual or a member of an organization. It says: "Libraries and instructors may obtain one each of as many as 100 free publications. Justification is required if more are ordered." For publications which carry a price, there are apparently no restrictions, but also no discounts.

Another service offered by the U.S.D.A. is this: "Microfilm and xerox copies of any Department publication in the Library's collection may be bought from the National Agricultural Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Beltsville, MD 20705." An order form (and presumably a catalog) is available upon request. This is thus an excellent source for out of print materials.

List No. 11 notes other potential bibliographic sources.

Various periodicals are listed, including *Bimonthly list of publications and visuals*, a non-cumulative compilation of U.S.D.A. productions. (*The Farm Index*, despite its title, is merely a monthly report of the Economic Research Service's research programs.) *Library Lists* "...are bibliographies of selected references on given subjects. The items cited are usually annotated, classified or topically arranged, and are supplied with author and subject indexes. The scope and period of time covered vary in each list and depend upon the requirements of those who request compilation...", the latter being agricultural research workers. Although the technical aspect of these lists probably limit their usefulness to the normal public library, the librarian should note that a subscription to this periodical, as well as certain other periodicals listed in List No.11 which might be of interest to the public, are free to libraries upon request.

Audiovisual aids are also considered:

> The motion pictures produced by the Motion Picture Service, Office of Communication, Department of Agriculture, are informational and instructional. They are designed to aid in disseminating information on agricultural products, their production, distribution and utilization. ... *All U.S.D.A. motion pictures are available from film libraries of the land-grant universities.*

Filmstrips and slide series, which are for sale only, are also available; a price list can be obtained from the Photography Division, Office of Communication, U.S.D.A., Washington, DC 20250. A price list for photographs and enlargements, as well as photographs appearing in U.S.D.A. publications (by negative number and/or bibliographic citation), can be obtained from the same source.

State governments also issue publications of interest, mainly through the Cooperative Extension Services and the Agricultural Experiment Stations, which are affiliated with the U.S.D.A. and are located at land-grant colleges and universities. Many of the Extension Service publications are of great interest to the homesteader, home economist, home builder, etc. Unhappily, there is no single source of bibliographic information which covers all fifty states, aside from the tedious *Monthly Catalog* and the non-cumulative *Bibliography of Agriculture*, neither of which offers in-print control. One is forced to rely upon the individual catalogs of each state's main office. To secure local publication lists, contact the local county agricultural extension agent (see county offices in the phone book), or write to the Cooperative Extension Service in care of the state land-grant agricultural college.

Earthbooks Lending Library

This is a relatively new (about two years old), private operation in Sweet, Idaho 83670, which has created a lending medium specializing in self-sufficiency publications. Its administrative set-up is similar in concept to the old subscription libraries of the 1800's:

> EARTHBOOKS maintains a large multiple-copy collection of all the latest and best homesteading how-to titles on the market. Library members are sent regularly updated catalogs containing descriptive reviews of each title. For 65¢ per book (50¢ rental, 15¢ postage & handling), members may borrow by mail and keep for about a month any title in the collection. If you want to keep a 'lender', just put it on your bookshelf and send in the indicated balance. *This will always be discounted according to book's present wear and will always be less the 50¢ rental fee!* If you don't want

> to keep the book, just mail it back by the indicated due date, ... To discourage ripoffs and indifferent treatment of books on loan, EARTHBOOKS requires members to maintain a $5.00 damage-or-loss deposit. *This is permanently and totally refundable upon membership cancellation if your account is 'clean'.*

There is no stated policy for interlibrary activity, and a query went unanswered. Nevertheless, Earthbooks is a possible answer to the patron who cannot draw what is needed from regional interlibrary sources.

Miscellaneous publications

Most libraries will routinely stock such periodicals as *Consumer Reports, Popular Mechanics, Popular Science, Popular Electronics,* auto repair and buying guides, craft and homemaking magazines, and so on. Among other publications, one must mention *The Last Whole Earth Catalog, The Whole Earth Epilog,* and the recent combined edition (address: 558 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94205). These publications, which are responsible for stirring many people's interest in energy-intensive living and do-it-yourself-ing, carry many book reviews and citations. The service is carried on by a new magazine called *The Coevolution Quarterly*, a supplement to the catalogs by the WEC staff.

The Southcentral Minnesota Inter-Library Exchange (SMILE) sponsors FARM-Center (Farmfest Agricultural Resource Media Center), which in turn publishes a nice little bibliography called *Farm Books* (1976). Everything listed can be requested from any library in the nine county SMILE region by local borrowers. The list is up-to-date and aimed at practicality; the items noted are widely available. Categorized sections in the 20 page publication include

all agricultural topics, with separate sections on government publications, "other sources of information", indexes, and magazines. Each listing includes the L.C. number. The list was recently made available for fifty cents from SMILE, c/o Mary Birmingham, Bethany Lutheran College, 734 Marsh St., Mankato, MN 56001.

For an annotated list of sources on solar/alternative energy and nuclear power information, it would be hard to beat the latest *Energy Catalog* from EARS (Environmental Action Reprint Service, 2239 E. Colfax, Denver, CO 80206. The cost is fifty cents.

Another good list, especially strong in arts and crafts, is the Earth Guild/Grateful Union catalog, a 160 page affair which also lists tools and craft supplies. There are no discounts on books. For the catalog, send two dollars to Earth Guild/Grateful Union, Hot Springs, NC 28743.

A sort of right wing, entrepeneurial alternative to *The Mother Earth News* is *Free Enterprise* (formerly *Capitalist Reporter*), 150 5th Ave., NY, NY 10011. It concentrates on high-profit home and small business ventures, including many book advertisements, citations, and some reviews. It is oddly counter-culture but capitalistic; a recent issue had such items as: black market beer (on smuggling Coor's beer into the East), oil, black collectibles (Little Black Sambo-type things), how to be an appraiser, survival briefs, homesteading schools, free travel, indoor gardening, jobs, fasting for health, cheap TV (bartering for air time), the newsletter game, Wall Street opportunities, mid-East trade, antiques, and other home businesses.

Audiovisual materials: besides the sources listed above and the standard sources such as the NICEM indexes and *Previews*, there are individual clubs and organizations which carry AV materials. One is Outdoor Eduquip, Box 1283, Madison, TN 37115, which has a small number of slide presentations (on wild plants and mushrooms), and a single film. There are many sources dealing with environmental topics, such as the Sierra Club.

The self-help, back-to-the-land picture today is one of growth and ferment, complicated by inflation, demographic change, and naivete. But whatever the fate of the social movements of the sixties, this is one that is bigger than ever, showing no signs of abatement. In the past, such movements were generated largely by economic circumstances, becoming especially strong in depression years. The current demand was generated by a different kind of social change; but should there be any further deteriorations in the economy, demand for these sources will skyrocket beyond their current state of high activity. The library cannot help but be affected.